

People think harder and produce better political arguments when their views are challenged

September 27 2017

People who are presented with political statements contradictory to their own beliefs tend to think harder and produce better arguments, according to research from Binghamton University, State University of New York.

Cengiz Erisen, a research associate in the Center on Democratic Performance at Binghamton University, along with fellow researchers David Redlawsk (University of Delaware) and Elif Erisen (Hacettepe University), looked at the effects of presenting [people](#) with [information](#) that conflicted with their [political ideologies](#). The researchers recruited 541 subjects from the Amazon crowdsourcing marketplace Mechanical Turk who leaned either liberal or conservative politically. They introduced the subjects to statements from a mock political candidate on the topics of illegal immigration, economic crisis and the nuclear pursuits of Iran. Half of the subjects were presented with statements incongruent with their political beliefs (e.g. conservatives were given liberal statements) and the other half were given statements in line with their beliefs. Subjects were then asked to share their supporting thoughts and opposing thoughts on the candidate's [statements](#).

The results showed that incongruent information significantly alters how people think about politics. The researchers found that, far from convincing people to change their minds, the new information reinforced their existing beliefs and actually made people think longer and harder,

and with more in-depth arguments, about how they defended them.

"Our robust findings...suggest that resisting a counter view or supporting one's own ideological viewpoint triggers deeper and more effortful information processing, leading to recall from memory of more thoughts and rationales and recognition of different dimensions of the issue," said Erisen. "This might be telling us something about the nature of motivated reasoning: people resist other political views not by few narrow-minded utterances blaming or downgrading the 'other'; they put effort into constructing opposing thoughts that are rich in content and volume. Whether they are opposing the counter ideological statement or supporting a statement in line with their own ideology, people produce thoughts of better quality when they defend their views."

Erisen believes that policymakers need to be aware of the results of the rhetoric they use. "The more they disregard the other side or oppose the contradictory or opposing policy statement, the public will follow that. The less exchange of information, the more the conflict will be," he said.

The paper, "Complex Thinking as a Result of Incongruent Information Exposure," was published in *American Politics Research*.

More information: Cengiz Erisen et al, Complex Thinking as a Result of Incongruent Information Exposure, *American Politics Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1532673X17725864](https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17725864)

Provided by Binghamton University

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